

Geographic Displacement of an Entropic Matrix

by Optronic Kinetics

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THE GEOGRAPHIC DISPLACEMENT OF AN ENTROPIC MATRIX BY OPTRONIC KINETICS

It is important to lead up to the actual displacement of the matrix by relating a series of happenings and conversations which will validate this action as a work of art.

Firstly, there is the "Entropic Matrix Kit". David Smith, a member of the Optronic Kinetics group, designed and assembled the first kit in early March 1971. It consisted of a plywood box 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 5" such as can be bought at a stationery store, and which normally contains filing cards. This box was labelled with Letraset letters, which were unevenly spaced and also vertically displaced in a random manner. The legend read:-

P
C R
ENTRO I MA I X KI T.

Inside the box there was a green baize lining, and the box was filled part of the way with 2" steel washers (221 plus 16 spares). On the inside of the lid were the operating instructions:-

1. Place the objects on the floor of any room you frequent.
2. Arrange in a rectangular matrix using the spacer provided.
3. Allow the matrix to be disturbed by events in the room.

David SMITH, March 1971.

The spacer provided was a square piece of wood measuring 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " with the corners cut in a quarter segment of a

circle. To facilitate manipulation there was a chrome handle on the spacer.

Several variants of these kits were proposed and discussed. For example, a sugar cube matrix on a lawn.

David showed these kits to a great number of people and gave away about a dozen of them. One, Alex Tzannes, an architecture student at Sydney University, visited the Fine Arts workshop and saw the Matrix Kit. He talked to David Smith about it.

The circumstances of Dr Harald Szeemann's visit to Australia are well known. The works selected by him in Australia were to be exhibited at Bonython Gallery in Sydney, opening on Thursday the 29th April.

Thursday 22nd April

At 11.30 a.m. the Optronic Kinetics group (Jim McDonnell, David Smith and Herbert Flugelman) visited Bonythons to deliver some colour slides. On the floor of the gallery they saw two bags of Perspex disks. Each disk was approximately 2 1/2" in diameter, 1" thick, with a hole in the centre. Nearby was the beginning of a matrix using the terra cotta floor tiles as a spacing device. This looked very similar to David's matrix. The instruction sheet which was on top of the bag urged one to lay the Perspex disks into a regular grid and over the period of the exhibition watch the gradual disintegration of the matrix. It also stipulated that the situation would be photographed each day and a copy of the photograph should be posted adjacent to the grid. These instructions were signed by Alex Tzannes.

Subsequently Alex came to the Fine Arts workshop and maintained that the concept of any work of art was of prime

importance and that the originator (author) was irrelevant. "Authorship does not matter", and "It is the concept not the object".

Wednesday 28th April

An advertisement was placed in the Public Notices column of the Sydney Morning Herald, which read:-

"Announcing the geographic displacement
of the imitation realist matrix
by Optronic Kinetics."

This advertisement unfortunately did not appear the following morning. When enquiries were made at the Herald the explanation was, "We did not understand the meaning of the ad, and were apprehensive that it might have something to do with drugs." After suitable explanation, the Herald agreed to publish the notice the following morning, which in fact they did.

Thursday 29th April

Opening day of the exhibition.

At 4.00 a.m. Optronic Kinetics, accompanied by Warren Moorfoot as official photographer, gained entry to the Bonython gallery courtyard by helping one of their number over the ten foot back gate. He in turn opened the gate from the inside, allowed the others to enter, and shut it again securely. In a matter of minutes, Alex Tzannes' matrix (221 Perspex washers plus 25 spares) was replaced by a matrix of steel washers. The whole affair was photographed with the aid of an electronic flash and a

Nikkormat camera, after which the culprits left by opening the gate quietly and shutting it carefully after them.

At 5.30 a.m. the coup was suitably celebrated with a champagne breakfast. Photographs of this are also part of the documentation.

By 9.00 a.m. the Perspex washers were carefully packed in a wooden box. One of David Smith's instruction sheets was inserted, the box nailed shut and taken to "YOUNGS" the carriers. The box and contents were then shipped back to Alex Tzannes, care of the School of Architecture, Sydney University. Instructions were given that this was to be delivered on Tuesday, 4th May.

12.00 noon, a call was received by Optronic Kinetics from Bonython Gallery asking about the matrix. Optronic Kinetics readily admitted responsibility for the exchange. When asked to return the matrix it was pointed out that the matrix had already been dispatched and that Optronic Kinetics by this time had only a receipt. Bonythons then suggested that charges of breaking and entering might be laid.

2.00 p.m. John Kaldor rang and asked for the return of the Perspex disks. Offers to explain the situation were repeatedly refused. Mr Kaldor also offered to lay charges of breaking and entering. As an additional incentive he offered to write to Professor Williams, Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University, and to Professor Bernard Smith of the Fine Arts Department, Sydney University.

8.00 p.m. Optronic Kinetics went to the opening of the exhibition armed with a camera for further documentation. The gate leading into the courtyard was now adorned with 4" spikes. This was photographed and subsequently claimed as a work of art by Optronic Kinetics. The steel washers had been removed and had been replaced by a new set of Perspex disks, however there were no instructions posted. Alex Tzannes was there. During conversations it was suggested to him that he would have been far better off letting the steel washers remain, as this would have supported his assertion that it was the concept and not the object which was paramount. He agreed with this, and the gist of his reply was that he knew it and had wanted to do just that, but that everybody had insisted and he was pushed into replacing them. He said that John Kaldor had commissioned Mike Kitching to have a new set made in time for the opening, and that he believed it cost nearly a thousand dollars.

The motive which prompted Optronic Kinetics to engage in the exchange of the matrix was the need to draw attention to a situation, and the hope that some thought might be given to the issues raised.

The argument is not one against objects, or even beautiful objects. However, it is claimed that the Entropic Matrix is conceptual in nature and that only the idea of random disintegration is the work of art; that the work is not anonymous and that authorship should be acknowledged.

It was to dramatise this conflict of opinion that Optronic Kinetics decided to replace Alex Tzannes' matrix with David Smith's, to focus attention on a situation where otherwise we felt amicable ignorance, and fuzzy thinking would carry the day, without the issue even having been properly confronted.

The exchange of the steel washers for the Perspex disks was a comment on the authorship of the concept, but not necessarily an assertion that steel washers are the only objects proper to the situation. The subsequent substitution of Perspex disks for steel washers seems to assert at enormous expense that it is not the concept but the object which is being exhibited. If that was the intention, and the absence of a set of instructions at this stage seems to bear this out, then one wonders what the original instructions were all about. What was it Szeemann selected, an object or a concept?

It is entirely proper to introduce objects to allow processes to take place which bring home to us concepts. In this case the concept was a random disintegration of order. However, one would argue that the less assertive these objects are, the less attention they focus on their object-hood, the better they are suited to this purpose.